

2010 Commander's Guidance



The purpose of this memorandum is to provide guidance for 2010 to special operations commands and personnel.

Our Nation holds the highest expectations of its Special Operations Forces. We are expected to be consummate professionals – mature, highly trained and fiercely independent warriors. We must excel under the most demanding conditions while accomplishing some of the most difficult and sensitive tasks, often with limited specific guidance. My intent is that 2010 is a year during which we will rededicate ourselves to the principles that have defined SOF and our historic successes.

We in the special operations community have great cause to be extremely proud of the force we provide to operational commanders around the world. Under pressure, in ambiguous circumstances, on the edge, our force is performing superbly. We have been recognized and highlighted for the imaginative approaches to warfare by our planners, the technical wizardry of our staffs, the specialized excellence of our supporting personnel, and the skill, boldness and raw courage of our operators in the field.

We in SOF know that it is in our DNA to continuously scrutinize ourselves, to fearlessly address our shortfalls, to lead change. We must always anticipate new realities, appreciate nuances, understand the operational context of our evolving strategic environments, and move ahead of the wave. Although we can be quite satisfied with the condition and quality of our force, there is still much more to do.

My three priorities upon which all special operations forces need to focus – mission, people, and equipment – remain unchanged. First, our mission to deter, disrupt, and defeat terrorist threats remains one of steadfast commitment and unwavering resolve. Second, we must develop and support our people and their families, and instill in all our assigned forces the SOF mindset. And finally, we must continue to sustain and modernize the force through rapid and focused acquisition processes.

The focus of effort by special operations forces in 2010 will be on optimizing SOF-peculiar contributions to global stability with emphasis on the continuing conflicts in Afghanistan and Iraq, and on the growing challenges in Pakistan, Yemen, the Horn of Africa and the Trans-Saharan region. We will sustain our efforts in Colombia and Republic of the Philippines while taking advantage of every opportunity to support smaller scale efforts in countries with high potential for future crises.

Special operations forces are diverse in their missions, capabilities and cultures. We are many tribes joined by commonality of overall purpose. In 2010, we will seek to optimize the relevance and contributions of each element of SOF while strengthening the entire SOF team. In so doing, we will strive for increased interoperability with our partners from the General Purpose Forces, other government agencies, other nations and international organizations – the contributions of our partners in these organizations are essential to our success. Underlying every decision and action will be an understanding of, and appreciation for, the unique characteristics of our force.

Special operations forces can take great pride in our historical ability to recruit and retain quality personnel. Over many years, the men and women of SOF have proven that they are especially motivated, innovative, tenacious, physically fit, mentally tough and ethically sound. Our operational tenets are built on the themes of agility, speed, teamwork, professional excellence, constant pursuit of victory and intolerance of failure. Within special operations forces, substance trumps theatrics, knowledge trumps doctrine, and finesse trumps mass. Our successes have resulted from cleverness, persistence and the personal knowledge of each others' abilities that results from frequent interaction over the course of our careers. Growing SOF too quickly or diluting our "SOF-ness" through rapid or temporary integration of too many non-SOF personnel will be to our detriment.

In 2010, we will strive to do the best we can with what we have in accordance with our priorities, which reflect the priorities of operational commanders. We will make every effort to apply the right force to the right missions, make our headquarters elements more efficient, commit to longer deployments in non-combat and supporting roles, eliminate unnecessary positions and processes, and focus our resources and energies on the tactical elements and individual SOF operators. We do not all play equal roles in the operational forces, and our priorities must work to the advantage of those who will face combat, assume greater personal risk, live by their wits or represent us in far-away places alone or in small groups.

In general, 2010 will be a year of "tighten up" for the SOF community in order to ensure we are in fact doing what is most important. Or, as many of you have heard me say in recent months, we will concentrate our institutional efforts on the third phase of Ready, Fire, Aim. We were very Ready on 9/11, we have been Firing with great effect since then, but now it is time to adjust our Aim in response to the changing nature of the conflicts that so undeniably require that SOF be at the top of our game.

We must also continuously scrutinize our organizations, processes, procedures and equipment inventories to identify and eliminate the redundancies and inefficiencies that seem to creep into our activities. We will also determine through analysis which of our recently procured equipment systems do not need to be sustained in our motor pools and warehouses.

Successful special operations result more from a mindset than a skill set. Let's cultivate the creativity, aggressiveness, thoughtfulness, regional expertise, independence, warrior ethos, humility and even some of the renegade spirit that established SOF as the preeminent force in complex and sensitive operations. To help do this, let's review and refresh the concepts of special warfare, unconventional warfare, psychological operations, counterinsurgency warfare, guerilla warfare, remote area operations, counterterrorism, counterproliferation and stability operations as they apply uniquely to special operations forces.

At the same time, we will continue to press ahead with vigor in our pursuit of techniques and technologies that mitigate our adversaries' inherent advantages. Each of the major

organizations of SOF must focus on what it is expected to do best. "Full-spectrum capabilities" is a term that applies to the total SOF force, not to all of our individual units. Every unit and sub-unit must master its trade before expanding beyond it. Incentivize the development of the highest-value capabilities. Let go of the lowest-value capabilities.

We cannot sustain our effectiveness without the enduring support of our families. We are asked to do a great many things to protect our Nation, and all of them place additional demands on those who are closest to us. Continuing care for our wounded or injured warriors, and for the families of those who have been seriously injured or killed, is among our most solemn responsibilities.

As we move ahead:

- Look forward, push forward. If forward, reach back.
- Synergize the effects of National Mission Forces and Theater Mission Forces whenever feasible.
- Steep selected individuals in language and regional/sub-regional knowledge.
- Increase individual and small-unit engagements outside of OEF and OIF.
- Harden up, lighten up, be agile. Never sacrifice effectiveness for expedience or convenience.
- Communicate. Increase human interaction at every level.
- Do not outsource thinking; foster creative thought across our force
- Reaffirm the logic and purpose of our systems, processes and actions.
- Spread commitments and opportunities across the elements of our force that are capable of responding to them.
- Eliminate "hobbyism," parochialism and arrogance from our force by doing what we ought to do, not what we want to do.
- Be courageous in moving the best people to the key positions.
- Procure specialized equipment for missions, not for morale.
- Enforce OPSEC. SOF operations are sensitive and our people and their families deserve the protection that silence helps provide.

I am convinced that the talent, energy, experience and courage resident within SOF – the pure quality of our people and our underlying ethos – will contribute to an ever-increasing demand for our force. The powerful effects of SOF in the areas where our forces are properly employed are often recognized as game-changers. And, our force operates optimally without frills, drama or fanfare. It is up to all of us to ensure that we train hard, respect our own standards, uphold our own values and instill the right mindset in our headquarters, staff, operators and support personnel.



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